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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify leadership qualities and proficiencies that a sample of school board members thought essential to being a successful campus administrator. The qualitative study consisted of six interviews conducted using a blend of the structured-interview and interview-guide approaches. The inquiry focused on determining school board members' knowledge of the principal's role in six domains: (1) learner-centered leadership; (2) learner-centered climate; (3) learner-centered curriculum and instruction; (4) learner-centered professional development; (5) equity in excellence for all learners; and (6) learner-centered communication. The results of the interviews indicate that school board members had a definite image of what the principal's role should be in domains 1, 2, and 6. However, the roles in domains 3, 4, and 5 were not as well understood. Overall, even though board members respected the principalship, they felt that campus leaders needed to be more "civic" minded. Continued "partner" relationships were encouraged to make better use of limited resources and to form communication links between businesses and campus leaders. Appended are brief excerpts from "Learner- Centered Schools: A Vision for Texas Educators" and the "Interview Guide Proposed Questionnaire." (RJM)

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From The School Board's Perspective:

Components Of Effective Campus Leadership

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December 16, 1997

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From the School Board's Perspective:

Components of Effective Campus Leadership

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Educational Leadership and Foundations

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Running head: SB: EFFECTIVE CAMPUS LEADERSHIP

Abstract

From the School Board's Perspective:

Components of Effective Campus Leadership

The purpose of this study was to identify leadership qualities and proficiencies which school board members thought essential to being a successful campus administrator. Possible correlations with the six administrator proficiencies recorded in the Texas Education Agency's *Learner-Centered Schools: A Vision for Texas Educators* are examined. The qualitative study consisted of six interviews conducted using a blend of the structured interview and interview guide approaches. Inquiry focused on determining school board members' knowledge of the principal's role in each of the following domains:

1. Learner-Centered Leadership
2. Learner-Centered Climate
3. Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction
4. Learner-Centered Professional Development
5. Equity in Excellence for All Learners
6. Learner-Centered Communication

Findings indicate that school board members have an image of what the principal's role should be in domains 1, 2, and 6. That role in domains 3, 4, and 5 is not as well understood. Overall, though board members respect the principalship, they feel that campus leaders need to be more "civic" minded. Continued "partner" relationships were encouraged to make better use of limited resources and to form communication links between business and campus leaders.

From the School Board's Perspective:

Components of Effective Campus Leadership

"Fully 2/3 of the nation's 100,000 principals intend to quit or retire by the turn of the century. More disturbing--the very best principals appear to be the ones most likely to abandon their positions."

-- Roland S. Barth
Improving Schools from Within

Project Background

Schools are multi-faceted organizations. Achieving and sustaining a high quality institution within a complex environment calls for the principal to possess a wide range of leadership capabilities. Historically, principal preparation programs have been designed to provide a solid foundation in the area of school administration. Indeed, in most such programs, prospective administrators are inundated with theory. Edwin F.Ginty (1995) contends that "Courses in such fields as school-community relations, school finance, administering school services, curriculum development, school law, and personnel management are generally associated with increasing effective administrator performance" (p.3).

Prospective campus leaders, therefore, typically have few opportunities to wrestle with applying educational theory to specific professional problems and challenges. According to the National Association for Elementary School Principals' (NAESP) *Proficiencies for Principals* (revised 1997), "they [preparation programs] fall short in translating such knowledge into action in the schools" (p. v). Consequently, educational administration preparation programs need to change--they need to become more reflective of the roles campus leaders play. As Mike Milstein (1993) asserts, "[This] challenge calls for strong and creative leadership...it calls for a reconceptualization of how educational leaders are prepared" (p. vii). Inquiry, then, focuses on the components of an effective principal preparation program. What is it that effective campus administrators should know and be able to do?

At the University of Texas at El Paso, the curriculum leading to Texas mid-management certification is undergoing extensive review in an effort to make that process more relevant and more conducive to producing highly effective campus leaders for the diverse El Paso community. Criteria used in measuring how well the *Learner Centered Outcomes for Texas*, the foundation of the new administrator preparation program, are operationalized, however, depend upon data gathered from various the stakeholders involved in the campus leadership

selection process--even those groups from which facets of the educational community might not wish to hear. For a program to truly serve its constituents--all opinions deserve validation. A report published by National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 1992) and cited by Linda Lumsden (1992) stresses that the "need for a coordinated approach to change on the part of all those who have a legitimate stake in administrator preparation...the roles and functions performed by each entity must be understood...and all...must work together for better communication, cooperation, and mutual action" (ERIC [On-line] Available:http://www.ericae.net/edo/ED350726.HTM).

As stakeholders in the educational process, school board members do have a voice in what constitutes the preparation and development of effective school leaders. The purpose of this project was to gather school board members' perceptions of the leadership qualities and proficiencies necessary to be a successful campus administrator in El Paso, Texas. Of particular interest was inquiry into whether or not a school board member perceived the operationalism of important skills and knowledge needed by effective building executives in a manner congruent with the criteria expressed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in *Learner Centered Schools for Texas: A Vision of Texas Educators* (1995). (See attachment containing excerpts from that document.)

Review of Literature

Leadership

A review of leadership theory provides evidence to support the contention that there is considerable confusion revolving around the nature and function of leaders. There seems to be little agreement on not only what comprises the basic definition of the word "leadership;" but also what criteria constitutes "effective leadership." Stogdill (1974) states that "there are almost as many definitions as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (p. 259). Bennis and Nanus (1985) report finding over three hundred fifty (350) definitions in the literature. (Cited in Telford, 1996; p. 8) Following Taylor's (1911) classical view in which leadership was viewed predominantly as a matter of hierarchical power over subordinates with a primary concern for task completion (Mintzberg, 1973), three basic approaches to the study of leadership emerged (Lipham & Hoeh, 1974).

The first of these was a psychological approach which viewed the leader as a person with a distinctive personality makeup and which assumed that what a person did in a job could be predicted from individual biological and psychological characteristics. Researchers adopting this approach tended to either identify those characteristics which others viewed as crucial in a leader or to

analyze the lives of great leaders in an effort to determine which traits defined that person's ability to "lead". According to Handy (1985), such trait theories "rest on the assumption that the individual is more important than the situation in determining successful leadership, denying the complexities of the leadership milieu and not really getting to the bottom of what makes the difference between effective and ineffective leadership in a variety of situations" (p. 93).

The second approach to the study of leadership, a sociological one, represented an attempt to move from the analysis of traits to the examination of the roles and relationships experienced by individuals in leadership positions. Hemphill (1949) identified many factors including size of group, homogeneity of group members, and group intimacy as being important as well as the leader's position, opportunity to participate, satisfaction, and dependence upon the group. Proponents of such a human relations view (Follett, 1941; McGregor, 1960) focused more on the people in organizations; they tended to view "leadership" as interaction between leaders and others in a group (cited in Telford, H. 1996, p.8).

The third approach to leadership to emerge was a behavioral one. Behaviorists such as Barnard (1938) advocated leadership as both people and task oriented. Utilizing this approach, researchers in the past attempted to describe "leadership" in terms of many phenomena simultaneously. Indeed, such

contingency views (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey and Blanchard, 1982) proposed that no one leadership approach could be claimed as the most effective; successful "leadership" was contextual. (Telford, 1996, p. 8). In an attempt to define the elusive concept of "leadership", each "new" approach developed as a response to one or more shortcomings in a previous definition.

In the late 1970s, James McGregor Burns added another dimension to the premises surrounding leadership theory. In her book *Transforming Schools Through Collaborative Leadership*, Helen Telford (1996) explains the distinction made by Burns (1978) between transactional and transforming leadership. Defined by Telford (1996), *transactional* leadership occurs as individuals within an organization reach mutually satisfying agreements through negotiation of their individual interests with the leader. (p. 8) *Transformational* leadership, however, "involves an exchange among people seeking common aims, uniting them to go beyond their separate interests in the pursuit of higher goals" (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1988). In the words of Teleford (1996):

> Unlike early notions of individual leadership, transforming leadership...acknowledges that in today's challenging and demanding educational climate of constant and turbulent change, no single person alone is likely to have the combined capacities necessary to engage in

effective leadership. Leadership at its best is a shared venture engaged in by many. (p. 9)

The Principal's Role

An examination of the literature surrounding the principalship yields little consistency among authorities regarding the actual nature of that role. A definitive understanding of the campus leader's multifaceted role appears elusive--an apparent need exists to further clarify the role of the principal if leadership preparation programs are to be truly effective. According to Daresh (1986), problems with role clarification (understanding who they are, now that they are principals, and how they are supposed to make use of their authority) is a concern voiced by many aspiring and beginning principals (Cited in *The Professional Development of School Administrators*, Daresh and Playko, 1992, p. 90).

Kellams (1979) suggests that the role of the principal in United States schools is an evolving one. The problem of role definition is that the principal's job description has become a working document rather than a clear and fixed definition. The principalship is viewed more often as the transition from *manager* [italics added] of a productive present to *facilitator* [italics added] of change. (Mackler 1996). In his article, Mackler (1996) states, "one role [manager] honors

stability, manageability, and finite accomplishments, while the other [facilitator] embraces action, shared decision making, and a focus on the future" (p. 1-2). Erickson and Reller (1979) conclude that despite all the fluctuating and often contradictory expectations:

> The principalship continues to be one of the most durable and critical positions in the administration of American schools. Although there are variations in the size and location of schools and school systems, differences in the personalities and experiential backgrounds of principals, and variation in the socioeconomic circumstances of children, youth and parents served, the building principal remains the administrator most closely associated with the daily operations of the school, with the implementation of curriculum, and with its association with the community" (22).

In their study of innovative principals, Reynolds and Reynalds (1967) espouse eight (8) distinctive roles. In their view, it is within the role of the principal to:

- Establish school climate
- Work with subordinates
- Develop good interpersonal relationships with and among staff
- Influence adoption of innovations by staff

- Generate innovations
- React to and with superordinates
- Make decisions
- Communicate support for innovations

Contrast Reynolds (1967) campus leader's job description with Ryan and Cooper (1975) who describe the principal as occupying several positions among which are:

- Official leader
- Helper
- Initiator
- Crisis Manager
- Facilitator
- Reward dispenser
- Judge
- Buffer among parents, students and teachers
- "Sacrificial lamb"

Lipham (1977) in his examination of the role of the principal concluded that the "principal is a significant internal change agent and a crucial linkage agent for the school. The ability of a principal... is improved and strengthened by

increasing contacts with educational systems and people external to the school" (Cited in the *Saskatchewan Principalship Study Report*, Ruth Wright and Pat Renihan, 1986, [On-line] Available: http://www.ssta.sk.ca/research/sz/127.htm).

Therefore, the principalship brings with it the constituency's expectation that the campus leader be "all things to all people." The literature, then, implies that when a beginning principal first assumes that role, he/she is in reality not accepting a solitary role; but rather a multifaceted one.

Principal Preparation Programs

A common theme in the literature is that administrator training has failed to keep pace with changing times and changing expectations of leaders. As the NASSP publication *Developing School Leaders: A Call For Collaboration* (1992) notes, "Preparation programs in educational administration have been locked into modes of thinking and structures of practice that have been overtaken by changes in the environment." (ERIC Digest, 1992, [On-line] Available: http//www.ericae.net/edo/ED350726.HTM). Although some administrative preparation programs strive to connect the relationship between theory and practice in student's minds by offering internships or mentorships; in many cases this does not happen (Lumsden 1992). Another concern is that some administrator training programs do not adequately prepare prospective principals for the hectic

pace and varied content of the job. Trainees should be helped to effectively assess and respond to "human situations" (Schmuck, 1993). Strengthening aspiring principals' conflict resolution skills, face-to-face communication skills, as well as educating trainees about the emotional demands of the principalship should be high priorities in administrative preparation programs (Anderson, 1991). Chester Finn (1988) agrees as he asserts, "States should strive to make their certification requirements reflect the knowledge, skills, experiences, and attitudes that principals must have to do their jobs well..." (p. 20). The preparation of future administrators should be "something that [is]...mutually shared by all those who would be identified as legitimate stake holders in the development of educational leadership" (Daresh and Playko, 1992, p. 13).

School Board Members

As elected public officials, school board members are in the unique position to serve as a link between the school system and the public--interpreting the schools to the public and public views to the schools. It is up to school board members to help build support and understanding of public education and to lead their communities in demanding quality education. The Colorado Association of School Boards (1975) challenges each new board member to stay "informed about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in

programs providing needed information. Each board member is challenged to support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school staff..." [On-line] (Available: http://www.casb.org).

A search of the literature concerning school board members revealed five major functions of local educational governing school boards (Anderson 1992):

- Policy making
- Personnel relations
- Educational programs
- School finance
- School plant and services

(Wisconsin Association of School Boards, 1988, [On-line] Available: http://www.wasb.org).

Of special interest to this study was the "personnel relations" section of a school board member's job description. Anderson (1992) relates that effective school board members should insist that objective selection criteria as well as open and objective selection procedures be used when hiring new employees; that the administrators be given recognition of their expertise on curriculum issues; that school leaders be given support for innovative practices which place student educational needs ahead of personal and political gain. School boards "should...

involve principals in a joint assessment and related improvement effort" (p. 16). To this end, Danzberger, Carol, Cunningham, Kirst, McCloud and Usdan (1987) refer to school board members as "the forgotten players on the educational team..." (Cited in Fullan, 1991, p. 245).

In light of a 1988 projection that by 1998 between 35,000 and 50,000 school executives will leave their current schools, Chester E. Finn (1988) in the *Executive Educator* states that school board members "should be familiar with what research tells us about the principalship" (p. 20). Since principals are charged with effectively implementing Board policy, it seems imperative that an understanding dialogue exists between the two entities. For meaningful conversations to occur, Finn (1988) argues that board members should be aware that:

- Effective principals see themselves as leaders--and others see them that way, too.
- Effective principals transform their vision into reality through daily practices in which their actions underscore their words.
- identifying candidates who can do these things ought to begin years before any vacancy arises.

- The selection committee needs a clear picture of the kinds of schools the board and community want--and the kinds of principals who can create and lead them.
- Prospective principals who show promise need to be furnished with the training and experience that will develop them into strong school leaders. (p. 20)

Barry G. Lucas (1985) describes the definite role a principal should play in relation to the local school board as "a proactive style of leadership... opposed to merely allowing local boards to drift, perhaps with unforeseen and unfortunate consequences both for the local board and the school....principals should develop basic strategies for working closely with the chairperson of the local board; getting trustees actually involved in school activities and projects; and providing local board meetings with regular reports of school activities" (p.14). In this manner, trustees might be viewed as occupying a more supportive role.

Patricia Howlett (1993) makes the statement that school board members need to identify principal's existing perceptions and forge avenues of communication, so they [board members] can more easily respond to constituent concerns (p.16). Said another way, "you can't be an education leader without being a community leader and a government leader, because they're all rolled together" (p.18).

Design and Methodology

Rationale

The El Paso educational community shares with its national counterparts the determination to regain society's endorsement and support for its endeavors. As public and legislative scrutiny mounts, campus administrators must be prepared to heed the public demand for improved student achievement and effectively focused instructional efforts in the classroom. As the Texas Education Agency (TEA) mandates mastery of such proficiencies from administrators, those involved in the selection and training of educational leaders find themselves in a position to systematically identify applicants who possess the leadership qualities now associated with effective schools.

Problem Statement

As stake holders in the educational process, school board members have a voice in what constitutes the preparation and development of effective school leaders. The purpose of this project was to gather school board members' perceptions of leadership qualities and proficiencies necessary to be a successful administrator in El Paso, Texas. Of particular interest to this project was distinguishing whether or not a school board member perceives the operationalism of important skills and knowledge needed by effective campus

leaders in a manner congruent with that expressed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in *Learner Centered Schools for Texas: A Vision of Texas Educators* (1995). (See attachment containing excerpts from that document.) In *An Analytical Description of the School Principal's Job*, Gary Gottfredson (1990) explains that interaction between the principal and board officials is necessary to ensure "negotiation with central office in revising, changing or updating educational goals and objectives, to affect school policies, to interpret directives, to conform school plans or practices to policy established by governing officials" (p.12). It is hoped that information gleaned from this study will contribute to the revision of the mid-management certification program at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Sample

This study involved two (2) school board members from each of the three (3) major independent school districts in El Paso County. Chosen as a purposive sampling to insure equalization of representation of both gender and ethnicity, the participating total was six (6) persons-- three (3) women and three (3) men. From an ethnic perspective, the sample composition was fifty percent (50%) Anglo and fifty percent (50%) Hispanic. In the three participating school districts, at the time of the study, no African Americans were school board

members. David R. Krathwohl (1993) explains that this method of selection is especially useful when sampling "politically important cases that if not included would cast doubt on the conclusions of a study" (p. 138). Through each respective district's Office of the Superintendent, I was given approval to speak with specific board members from that district. Also by speaking with two (2) school board members from each district, I hoped to enhance the study's generalizability by examining multiple actors in multiple settings. As Huberman and Miles (1994) explain, " ...the key processes, constructs, and explanations in play can be tested in several different configurations. Each configuration can be considered a replication of the process or question under study" (p. 435).

Method

A qualitative research design utilizing face to face interviews was employed for this research project. A letter sent from the researcher to the potential participants stated that any data obtained would remain confidential unless the participant gave permission for its disclosure. This letter also sought permission for the researcher to audio-tape the interviews--an option the interviewee could accept or decline. I felt that taping the interview would allow me greater personal interaction with the school board member, freeing me from note-taking and consequent distraction from interpersonal dialogue. In an

additional effort to protect the anonymity of the participants, written assurance was given that the audio-tapes, if used, would be destroyed at the conclusion of the research. In addition, school board members were advised that their participation in the project was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. Board members were asked to sign consent forms documenting their agreement to participate. Once permission for the interview was secured, interviews were held during October and November of 1997. Though time consuming, the interviews achieved the objective of providing insightful information in response to research questions. Incorporation of the less-structured interview guide technique allowed the researcher to steer the conversation along the lines of relevant factors under consideration without feeling the constraint being tied to a predetermined set of questions often brings. According to Malinoski (1989), " [structured] interviews aim at capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behavior within pre-established categories, whereas the latter [unstructured interviews] are used in an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (p .366). As Patton (1990) explains in his text, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, "this combination of techniques allows basic questions to be worded...in a predetermined fashion, while permitting the interviewer more

flexibility in probing and more decision-making flexibility in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth or even to undertake whole new areas of inquiry that were not originally included in the interview instrument" (p. 287).

Grounded theory, a method that has been used across a variety of social science disciplines, is the one on which this research project was based. The basic tenet of this approach is that theory emerges from data, or in other words, a theory must be grounded in the data. Hence, this approach purports to be inductive rather than deductive. As defined by two of its major proponents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), "the grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Cited in Chamberlain, 1995, [On-line] Available: http://www.irn.pdx.edu). The intent of grounded theory, then, " is to develop an account of a phenomenon that identifies the major constructs, or categories in grounded theory terms, their relationships, and the context and process, thus providing a theory of the phenomenon that is much more than a descriptive account" (Becker, 1993).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide four central criteria for a good grounded theory:

- It should fit the phenomenon; carefully derived from diverse data and faithful to the everyday reality of the area.
- It should provide understanding and be comprehensible to both the persons studied and those interpreting the data for their own understanding.
- It should provide generality; comprehensive data; conceptual and broad interpretation.
- It should provide control; state conditions under which the theory applies and providing a basis for action in the area.

This study, therefore, utilizes a qualitative approach in order to "incorporate many concepts and [make] multiple linkages among them. These [types of studies] are grounded in the actual social contexts and processes of everyday social life, and they are demonstrably linked to such phenomena" (Coffee, 1996, 144). The author of *Making Sense of Qualitative Data* (1996) continues to explain that such a technique emphasizes the "role of local cultures and the situationally specific, and...recognizes that social life and social action are essentially meaningful (p. 144).

Coding: The Beginning of Analysis

By having the framework in mind during fieldwork, Wolcott (1994) contends that "the researcher is assured that...descriptive ingredients...called for in the analysis...will be at hand" (p. 20). Careful reporting of "what actually is observed--even in single instances--is an important contribution..." (Wolcott, 1994, p. 33).

The process of data reduction was lent itself to Denzin's (1989) suggestion that the data be inspected for essential elements or components. "Once shared patterns or configurations have been identified, they can be arrayed along some dimension" (p. 436). Indeed, Guba (1978) suggests that ... to have a plan for converting observations about issues into systematic categories for analysis the evaluator:

- Look for "recurring regularities" in the data. These regularities represent patterns which may be classified as categories.
- Judge the categories as "internal homogeneity" or "external heterogeneity."
- Verify accuracy of categories

- Establish priorities to determine which categories are the most relevant to the research. As Patton (1990) indicates, "carefully consider making judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data" (p. 407).

In this project, I used the six (6) "Proficiencies for Administrators" addressed in the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) publication, *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas: A Vision for Texas Educators,* as an organizational system for developing meaning from the obtained data. Once audio- tapes from the interviews were transcribed, each proficiency was given a particular color and the interviewees' responses were color-coded according to the appropriateness of their placement within a particular section. Similar information was then clustered together under the designated heading and assigned a letter-number identification label for documentation purposes. The six divisions were:

- Learner-Centered Leadership
- Learner-Centered Climate
- Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction
- Learner-Centered Professional Development
- Equity in Excellence for All Learners
- Learner-Centered Communication

Miles and Huberman (1994) "suggest that this method of creating a start list of codes prior to reading the data...is a useful way of beginning to code" (Cited in Coffee, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*, 1994, p. 32). This organizational technique did allow me to read and reread the data-- pulling additional meaning from the details of each interview. The procedure was especially useful as the data relating to a certain topic was not found neatly bundled in exactly the same location within each interview. As Coffee and Atkinson (1996) explain, "The point is not to search for the right set of codes but to recognize them for what they are: links between particular segments of data and the categories we want to use in order to conceptualize those segments" (p. 45).

Findings

Against the backdrop of the *Learner-Centered Outcomes for Schools: A Vision for Texas Educators,* the operationalism of the six administrative proficiencies listed within that document were explored through the lenses of six school board members. Findings within each domain will be reported separately.

Learner-Centered Leadership:

Through inspiring leadership, the administrator maximizes learning for all students while maintaining professional ethics and personal integrity.

If improvements are going to made in the public schools, school principals will be instrumental in making many of them. Principals set the tone and the standards at their schools-- they motivate and reward, do long range planning, develop a vision for the school, and transmit it to the total school community. In the words of one school board member, "The principal is the most important position in the school district. He/she must be good at identifying problems and solving them. After all, if the principal does ... things well, he/she has a good school. In short, he/ she is a good leader" (Personal information, C/6).

A prerequisite to being an effective campus leader is the possession of solid beliefs in the inherent good of both public schools and the children who attend them. Campus leaders should expect high degrees of commitment from

teachers, students, and parents. Professional expertise should include high expectations for all who work in the organization as well as a knowledge of the mechanics needed to run an office--including financial and personnel management skills. To accomplish this, principals need to be warm, caring, trusting, and "willing to become involved in the lives of the students they serve" (Personal information, C7-8). School board members defined a skilled principal as one who is totally involved at not only the campus level, but the community level as well.

In the perception of school board members, an effective principal at the campus level is a "visionary"--someone who can articulate the vision and mission of the school in such a manner that it can be understood by all members--students, faculty, staff, parents, and community. This person is a "motivator, someone who fosters synergy...someone who gets all constituents to work toward the same goal and is not afraid to get all the players working in the same direction" while at the same time retaining the instructional focus on the child in the classroom (Personal information, C3-C6). A capable campus leader encourages team building by providing opportunities for colleagues to share their expertise. With a sense of understanding and compassion, effective principals encourage all members of

their organization to become lifelong learners; to stretch as they explore and "think beyond their personal boundaries" (Personal information, E63).

The importance of role-modeling, therefore, cannot be overlooked. To faculty and students alike the principal is the visual personification of the expectations and values cherished on that particular campus. One school board member related the following story:

> My idea of what leadership is came from the role models I had as a child. The principal of my school was one of them. It didn't matter that he wasn't famous. The fact that he was there was all that mattered. I think leaders have to be aware of who they are...you never know who you are influencing" (Personal information, B17-20).

Another board member added:

> It's very important that the [entire] staff know of their influence. The cafeteria ladies, the support staff, they never feel that they impact or have influence over a child's life. However, if a child walks into the cafeteria, and the cafeteria lady greets him with a smile, they've just started that child's day in the right direction. We never know what is happening at home...(Personal Information, E32-36).

Realizing this process requires courage, perseverance, and a myriad of opportunities, one school board member stated that "principals must be allowed to be creative--to approach ideas from a variety of perspectives" (Personal information, A11-13). Perhaps by allowing such flexibility, campus leaders will feel more confident in their ability to "make that tough or challenging decision...and stand by it" (Personal information, B46,47,53). At the same time, however, board members expected campus leaders to be held accountable for their expectations, actions, and results of critical decisions.

On the community involvement level, school board members felt that campus leaders were not taking advantage of all the resources that are available in that realm. It was their contention that effective principals should be community oriented and civic minded; that they should know the local leaders for they are involved in political action "whether they want to be or not...I feel that while principals know what's going on at the district level, most do not know what's going on at the city or state level" (Personal information, B4-5). One board member suggested:

> They [campus administrators] should be friends with city councilmen, they should know the mayor, they should know the power brokers--that way they can get in touch with a variety of resources...they need to know who they can go to for what (Personal information, B5-7, B12).

As managers of teachers and non-certified workers; as middle managers with goals for their schools, principals are actors with respect to the board. The current emphases on school accountability demands that the principal be political when providing information about the school to the community and to the board. The link to the community is one school board members feel principals must not lose sight of, for they are in the perfect position to identify organizations and individuals that could link the school with the community. The role of the personal and professional activities of the principal in the community is, therefore, a critical community relations factor.

One board member alluded to times when the principal might be called upon to "play the game" in order, as an advocate of the school, to get something that is needed on the campus. This person felt that "sometimes principals are afraid of compromising their integrity...but how can you have integrity only part of the time?" (Personal information, B35-40). This belief is congruent with persons contributing to Principal's On-line Forum (1995) who stated, "As for

difficult and influential individuals, as long as you remain a principal, you will need to deal with that problem, so I suggest reflecting upon your standards early on in order to deal with this in a calm, proactive manner" (Principal On-line Forum [On-line] Available: http://www.naesp.org).

The understanding and tapping of the community power structure, therefore, is crucial to successful school-community relationships. The principal, due to the publicness of the position, and access to public organizations, is the obvious leader (Supported by Krajewski, Martin and Walden, 1983). However, board members agreed that...students, teachers, parents, administrators, board members, and members from the community at large must come together to use this investment to its full potential" (Personal information, A65-67).

Learner-Centered Climate:

The administrator establishes a climate of mutual trust and respect which enables all members of the learning community to seek and attain excellence.

The tone, ambiance, or atmosphere of an organization is its climate. School board members addressed two aspects of building climate as having a direct influence on student achievement. One was the actual physical maintenance of the building facility itself; the other was the emotional/affective factors present among the various relationship networks embedded within the

school community. The school board members viewed the building climate as something largely determined by the leadership of the principal and the teachers' interactions. "The environment should permeate with the importance of each individual. If the teachers and principal and staff value learning; then the students will tend to do so also" (Personal information, C25-C26).

Board members believed that students function best in a "clean environment...one where classrooms are clean...one where the school does not need major repairs" (Personal information, A15-A17). While on campus, students should feel they are in a safe place as "for some of our students today, the only safe haven is the school environment" (Personal information, C10-C11). Rules should be established early and consequences to breaking those rules should be known and understood by all.

Factors influencing school climate which school board members agreed that campus leaders should be aware of included: the importance of getting people to feel good about themselves; the importance of setting an expectation of professionalism; the importance of personally interacting with students and being visible on campus; the importance of supporting teachers; and the importance of demonstrating a sense of humor. These will be covered in the following section.

It was the opinion of the board members that "the school environment should encourage and foster risk taking...even principals must feel that they can risk for the good of the students. Indeed...supportive environments create adventuresome people...people willing to risk...more willing to ask for items they want...more willing to defend a critical decision" (Personal information, A22, B70, D48-D50).

For board members, this aspect of an effective environment correlates with student achievement. How a child feels about himself and those around him will influence how he performs. "It is important that students feel comfortable enough to speak what is on their minds...indeed to speak up when they don't understand something" (Personal information, A22, A59, B70). "If the student feels like the work he is doing is of worth, then this reflects not only on the kind of work he does, but how he perceives himself as a person" (Personal information, D16-D19). Said another way: a positive environment leads to positive achievement. A negative environment amplifies the negative aspects of a student's behavior and limits achievement.

The degree to which campus faculty and staff affect school climate is embodied in the experience shared by one board member:

> They always say to go to the school office and the way the secretaries respond to you will be an indicator of the warmth on that campus...I really think that is true. If you have caring people who pay immediate attention to the person who is there at the counter, then you know that probably the teachers pay immediate attention to the students. That warmth is just something that you feel.
>
> Sometimes I watch the way teachers greet me or another student in the hallway. By observing the way a teacher interacts with a student, by watching the student's response...I can gauge whether a school environment is healthy or not.
>
> Finally, if you hear laughter coming from the teacher's lounge, I think that is a healthy indicator. I know it is always said that the teacher's lounge is where teachers gossip. However, if you hear healthy laughter coming from there, then you know something is right (Personal information, E12-E26).

School board members, therefore, recognize that successful schools are led by campus administrators who have constructed climates on their campuses which reflect feelings of openness, acceptance, and authenticity.

Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction:

The administrator facilitates the implementation of a sound curriculum and appropriate instructional strategies designed to promote optimal learning for all students.

It is the perception of school board members that the school principal is responsible for ensuring that an instructional program is being implemented at his/her campus which will equip students with not only a firm grasp of the basics-- "that is reading, writing, and math...but also...with leadership skills, cooperative strategies, and team building skills..." (Personal information, B144-145, C29). In this capacity, the principal needs to possess an up-to-date knowledge of instructional programs as well as an understanding of effective curriculum implementation. Effective curricular implementation is dependent upon the recognition that learning styles of children vary. "Some students are very visual...that have to see it before they get it. Others are very auditory--they have to hear it. Some students are combinations" (Personal information, A38-A41).

In schools today, therefore, children need exposure to a variety of situations from a faculty that is actively involved and knows the curriculum they have been hired to teach. The school board members felt that students needed to interact on a day to day basis using technology. The computer with its internet capabilities was thought to be the connection between students and the experiences they could only "wish" for a few years ago. As one board member stated, "You can't create the opportunities if you haven't had the opportunity yourself" (Personal information, B101-102) The solution? "Instead of taking the kids to the Grand Canyon...bring the Grand Canyon to the kids...via the internet...offer field trips to Russia, to China, to anywhere...for you're limited only by your imagination" (Personal information, D60-62).

An area of curriculum concern for school board members centered around the assignment of grades. It was felt that schools might take a look at their grading procedures and communicate those standards in a clearer fashion. As one board member stated:

> "I believe each child should be stretched and encouraged to reach his/her potential. I think it is criminal for a child who should be making As to be making Bs. However, I believe it is just as criminal for a child who should be making Fs to be making Cs. Students need to take responsibility for

their own imperfections. I think we have a tendency to sugar coat over the negative experiences. It is just as important that a child learn to deal with unpleasant experiences as with the pleasant ones" (Personal information, C59-C62, D24-D26).

A final area of the school curriculum that was perceived to be lacking was in the area of community service. "I truly believe that all kids should participate in some community service. Perhaps visit our elderly...perhaps work with children with disabilities. It's important for students to realize that not everyone lives in a nice house...not everyone has great clothes...You cannot get experience from non experience. Therefore, we need to establish programs that give students life experiences" (Personal information, B81-82).

There are several actions, then, that campus leaders can take when planning curriculum implementation according to school board members. These include: communicating what the new curriculum implies, providing the general community with knowledge about the new program, providing resources for the program, and providing adequate supervision to make certain that the curriculum is actually being implemented.

Learner-Centered Professional Development::

The administrator demonstrates a commitment to student learning through a personal growth plan and fosters the professional development of all staff in the learning community.

School board members acknowledged that as schools change, the skills needed by principals must also change. Topics of interest board members thought might contain beneficial knowledge for practicing principals included: management skills, staff evaluation, program evaluation and current trends/ issues. "The training has to be there for administrators...I don't think they come out of college programs...prepared to face the campus world...We want to train... administrators to want to learn...to do something to insure that kids will not be hurt in the future. (Personal information, B170-171).

The board members I spoke with suggested professional development ideas that were topic specific and oriented toward quick solutions. A concern I have is that the board members were operating under the assumption that awareness of a problem/solution automatically leads to its application when this may not necessarily be the desired sequence of events.

"Once a person takes a position in the district, it is our [the district's] responsibility to ensure that programs are available to them to continue in areas

they want to specialize in....Business should also begin to play a bigger role in the preparation process...especially in the area of financial support (Personal information, C43-47). Where a difference may exist as to who pays for the principal's professional development, there appears to be little disagreement over the premise that additional education and experience related to the role and responsibilities of the principalship is significant in improving the quality of educational leadership in the schools.

Equity in Excellence for All Learners:

The administrator promotes equity in excellence for all by acknowledging, respecting, and responding to diversity among students and staff while building on shared values and other similarities that bond all people.

School board members defined equity in one of two ways: either in relation to the effect of cultural influences on a child's education; or in response to the equalization and distribution of a limited supply of resources.

Board members perceived cultural influences as being directly correlated with a student's educational opportunity and level of achievement. As one board member related:

> Some parents don't know to read to their child each night...to provide food, clothing, and shelter is a huge burden in some families. It's up to the

> schools to make sure the children know that... [someone] believes in them and their ability to succeed. Kids need to believe in themselves. Schools are in the best position to give them the access to the tools they need to achieve that end. (Personal information, D65-69).

As schools move into the twenty-first (21st) century and a more global environment, it becomes essential that all students have access to resources which put them on the same "level playing field" as their peers in other parts of the city, the state, the country; indeed, the world. During this time of limited resources, (especially financial ones), school board members prefer to deal with equity issues on a case by case basis. Equity, then became a matter of prioritizing.

> I believe that you give more to those who need more...It all depends on the definition of need...You have to maintain a balance...Need means one thing to a student who is lacking experiences and another to a student who is lacking an advanced placement course. Do you allow some children certain experiences and deny those same experiences to others? Both students have legitimate needs in this scenario, and as board members we need to look at ways to accomplish both. (Personal information, C69-72).

Principals need to be aware of the values and interests represented by the various individuals and groups participating in the community served by the

school. The role of the principal on issues of equity is seen as instilling in all children the desire for knowledge. The campus leader should, therefore, create experiences which focus on the strengths of diversity; but also encourage students to respect each other's differences while celebrating their commonalties.

> I feel we learn more when we are forced out of our comfort zone--when we are made to deal with people with different beliefs, thoughts, and actions than ourselves. We become richer people because of it. (Personal information, D40-D42).

Successful campus leaders view diversity as a resource, and they acquire the knowledge and skill needed to take advantage of it. A principal should be able to recognize the strengths of others and utilize them for the common good of the organization.

Learner-Centered Communication:

The administrator effectively communicates the learning community's vision as well as its policies and successes in interaction with staff, students, parents, community members, and the media.

Educators at times experience considerable frustration because members of the public appear to grossly underrate the complexities and demands of school teaching and administration. The public is often perceived as having denied

professional status and skills to those who undertake the responsibility to educate today's children. The schools are "everybody's business" in terms of their significance in society and their proximity to the everyday lives of citizens. Direct public involvement in the schools provides the primary method by which the public gains an understanding as well as an appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of those who staff them.

The principal's ability to engage in effective communication plays a vital role in shaping the perception constituents hold of a school from both an internal and an external vantage point. The internal communication function addressees the ability of the campus leader to not only articulate and disseminate information to his/her staff in a timely fashion; but, to do so in a manner that is clearly understood by all intended listeners. Indeed, school board members recognized that the climate existing in a particular building is largely developed and maintained through the use of solid communication techniques. For example, whether it's an administrative memo, or a newsletter to parents, school board members felt that principals needed to be skilled in the art of disseminating accurate information.

Closely related to needed communication skills were several comments from board members regarding the importance of interpersonal skills such as those employed when working with special interest groups, especially the media. [Media, in this instance is defined as local newspaper, radio, and television coverage]. This coincides directly with principal's external communication function: that of projecting the desired image to those in the local community and to the media. As one board member commented, "The media shapes the perception of the district in the eyes of the public" (Personal information, A104-A105).

In dealing with the media; therefore, school board members felt it would be beneficial for campus leaders to forge partnerships with organizations outside the educational sphere. However, several school board members felt this will not be easy as it is the perception of many educators that the media does not realize the extent to which they are involved in touching the lives of children. In their coverage, "the media has the perfect opportunity to instill the importance of education in the minds of all people...however, the media does not portray education accurately. They tend to sensationalize...because that sells newspapers..."(Personal information, D70-D72).

One board member relays the following personal experience:

> I personally called the media as one of the schools in my area received the honor of being named a Recognized school. I contacted the paper several days in advance and told them I wanted some press coverage at the breakfast being held to recognize and honor the teachers...The lady at the newspaper assured me someone would be there...Did anyone show up? NO ONE SHOWED UP!
>
> I guarantee you, however, if I had called and said, "We're having problems down here; we have a bomb threat--we have kids walking out, etc." there would have been a reporter on the spot immediately. Here was the perfect opportunity...Here was an illustration of hard work paying off...Here were kids, narrowing the gap...Here was the perfect opportunity and they [the media] didn't do anything...As far as the media is concerned right now, at this point, I have no respect for the media...(Personal information, E108-E118).

It was this board member's perception that empathy and perceptiveness reveal how best to approach others; while openness and patience encourage them to take the initiative when necessary. Effective communication skills forge bonds,

nurture relationships, and inform attempts to mediate. Staff and community members equally benefit from the campus leader's skills in this area.

Limitations

In the initial stage of the project, I debated whether to design a "breadth" study of area school board members' (two members per each of the major districts in El Paso county) perceptions of the role of the principal in local schools, or a "depth" study (an examination of campus leadership perceptions from members of one single El Paso area board). Since one of the uses for project data targets students from various parts of the city who enroll in the university's mid-management program, I felt a broader understanding of area viewpoints was more appropriate to immediate needs. Therefore, I chose to develop a "breadth" study, realizing that in so doing I was sacrificing generalizability. A sample size of two (2) board members per district is certainly not indicative of the viewpoints of either a particular board as a whole or other individual board members residing in the area; however, I believe emergent themes can be identified. Indeed, Amanda Coffee (1967) says that "when we study local manifestations of culture and social worlds...findings are often representative of wider populations. We do not normally treat our ... informants as if they were samples in a statistical sense" (163). Coffee (1967) adds, "...qualitative data, analyzed with close attention to

detail...should be used to develop theoretical ideas about social processes and cultural forms that have relevance beyond those data themselves" (163).

Two further limitations to the study should be noted. One such unanticipated constraint proved to be gaining access to the board members themselves. School districts were reluctant to give me access to the board members. I was questioned as to my research intent and the use of the data resulting from the interviews. After assuring confidentiality, the General Superintendent's office in each of the three districts did approve the research; however, each Superintendent requested to approve the name of the board members with which I had scheduled interviews. I complied with this request as I felt limited access to certain board members was superior to potentially no access at all. The other constraint was the time limitations placed on the project by nature of it being embedded in the requirements of a semester college course. As more questions surfaced in the interviews, time for pursuit of those issues did not exist. Hence, many opportunities exist for further research in this area.

Patton (1990) alludes to three kinds of sampling errors which may arise in qualitative research designs:

- There may be distortion in the situations that were sampled for observation.

- There may be distortion introduced by the time period during which the observation took place.
- The findings may be distorted because of selectivity in the people who were sampled either for observations or interviews. (471).

Such distortions could have taken place as the members of school boards I spoke with were all officers on their respective boards. Further study would be required to determine whether perceptions obtained were related to the board position occupied at the time of the interview.

Conclusion

Good educational leaders elicit insights from many stakeholders in and outside of the school arena, nurture planning strategies that take their concerns into account, and engage a lot of partners in the work of making dreams come true. Over the long haul, effective leaders show respect for diversity, hear many voices, make sense of the message that each voice delivers so that each person feels heard. Sustaining such a dialogue enables principals, their faculties, the community they serve, and the school board to become partners in creating conditions which foster and encourage student success.

Concepts of effective campus leadership as developed in *Learner-Centered Outcomes of Texas: A Vision for Texas Schools* were

acknowledged as important by the school board members I interviewed. School board members had a clearer image as to what the Learner-Centered Leadership, Learner-Centered Climate, and the Learner-Centered Communication domains entailed. A less clear vision appeared in reference to what the Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction, Equity in Excellence for All Learners, and Learner-Centered Professional Development domains encompassed. As board members are not charged with micro-managing the day to day operation of schools, this outcome was viewed as congruent with the board members' business orientations.

However, if school board members are to be seen as crucial agents for school improvement, they should develop a clearer understanding of the multitude of roles the principal's job encompasses. Potential areas of conflict exist when principals perceive themselves as being pulled in various directions by a variety of superordinates for a myriad of seemingly unrelated reasons. Effective principal preparation programs could provide potential educational leaders with opportunities to access school board member's perceptions of the campus leader's role. Meaningful dialogue between the two entities has the potential to "gel" the community served into a true "learning" organization.

With this aim in mind, the board members I interviewed indicated that the principals are welcome to play a more active role in relationships with local boards. As Fullen (1992) states, "those [campus leaders] interested in effective educational reform will have to deal with school boards and with community members in a way that confronts the fact that these groups are essential for the eventual implementation of many reforms: the school board for its endorsements, provision of resources necessary to support implementation, and ability to ask the right questions about results..." (246).

Therefore, the principalship is a joint concern. A principal may have extraordinary visions for the school, but without the respect of community, students and teachers, without the opportunities made accessible by universities and professional organizations, without the guidance of senior administrative personnel, or the support of the board of education and government agencies, such visions may reside just beyond their reach. In the voice of one school board member:

> I feel we learn more when we are forced out of our comfort zone--when we are made to deal with people with different beliefs, thoughts, and actions than ourselves. We become richer people because of it." (Personal information, D40-D42).

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Appendix A

Excerpts from *Learner-Centered Schools*:

A Vision for Texas Educators

from

Learner-Centered Schools for Texas: A Vision of Texas Educators

Proficiencies for Administrators

Texas Education Agency

October 1995

1. **Learner-Centered Leadership**:

Through inspiring leadership, the administrator maximizes learning for all students while maintaining professional ethics and personal integrity.

2. **Learner-Centered Climate**:

The administrator establishes a climate of mutual trust and respect which enables all members of the learning community to seek and attain excellence.

3. **Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction**:

The administrator facilitates the implementation of a sound curriculum and appropriate instructinal strategies designed to promote optimal learning for all students.

4. **Learner-Centered Professional Development**:

The administrator demonstrates a commitment to student learning through a personal growth plan and fosters the professional development of all staff in the learning community.

5. **Equity in Excellence for All Learners**:

The administrator promotes equity in excellence for all by acknowledging, respecting, and responding to diversity among students and staff while building on shared values and other similarities that bond all people.

6. **Learner-Centered Communication**:

The administrator effectively communicates the learning community's vision as well as its policies and successes in interaction with staff, students, parents, community members, and the media.

Appendix B

Interview Guide Proposed Questionnaire

School Board Interview Guide Proposed Questionnaire
The source of each question is one of the proficiencies defined in TEA's *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas: A Vision of Texas Educators*
Draft

1. Describe for me the ideal campus administrator. Where did you develop these ideas? What has influenced your understanding of school leadership?

2. What type of environment should the campus administrator create in order to ensure optimum learning occurs on the campus? How would that environment look? In what ways do you feel the school environment contributes to student achievement?

3. What types of experiences do you want children in this district to have? What methods can teachers use to address the diverse needs of children in the classroom?

4. How can the school board impact the preparation of administrators? Do you perceive a need for campus leaders to further their own learning? In the area of technology, for instance, how can the school board help insure that campus leaders are adequately prepared to meet the challenges of a new century in a effective manner?

5. What is your definition of equity? Would you rather see resources allocated in larger amounts to those areas perceived as most in need, or would you prefer that resources be divided such that each stakeholder gets an equal portion?

6. What do you feel is the appropriate role of the media in dealing with education? How accurate do you feel the image of public education is portrayed? Does the school board play a role in shaping the image the public sees of schools and their leaders? Do you feel you have any control over the media in shaping this image?